

Transcript of Brain Based Strategies to Support Literacy Development in Adolescents

Amy Moritz: Good morning and welcome to today's webinar. My name is Amy Moritz, Youth Development Coordinator with Pennsylvania's 21st Century Community Learning Center's Program at the Center for Schools and Communities. I will be your moderator for today.

Kathy Gephart, who is a consultant for BLaST IU is our presenter for this session. It is my pleasure to welcome you to Brain-Based Strategies to Support Literacy Development in Adolescents webinar.

It is my pleasure now to welcome Kathy Gephart. Kathy is a consultant with the BLaST IU7 team and a graduate instructor at the University of Pennsylvania. She graduated from Penn State with a master's of education in curriculum and instruction and has been in the field of education for 30 years.

At this point, I would like to turn the microphone over to Kathy.

Kathy Gephart: Good morning everyone. And I certainly appreciate your interest in this topic: Brain-Based Strategies to Support Literacy Development in Adolescents. Perhaps you're starting this thinking that well, it might be impossible to understand adolescents and figure out how to help them but actually, the more we know about their brains, the better prepared we can be to help them not just navigate literacy but many things as well.

So as we go forward here, I would appreciate a little bit of feedback from you in terms of what is your role. And in all of the slides what I will do is I will read the text, so that you're not trying to read and listen to my saying something else.

So in your role, if you work directly with teens in a classroom setting, you would choose A. If you work indirectly with teens in a supervisory or program director role, choose B. If you are the parent of a teen, choose C. If you were once a teen, choose D. And that might seem like an odd question, but that's just making sure you're paying attention, I guess. E, if none of those things fits you. So hopefully, those things are ... I'll be seeing those results here in a moment.

I want to thank Amy for introducing and for being our monitor. And as she said, we will do our very best to answer all of your questions. And I would encourage you to write down your questions so that you don't forget them as we're moving through the information.

So, right now, only 10% of you were once a teen. That's interesting. And I see that our biggest proportion work indirectly with teens in a supervisory role. Thank you for responding and there's our results. And so let's move on.

There we go.

So, this is basically our agenda. These are the three main parts of what we are going to be talking about today. And the first thing that we need to understand is that all brains change over time. And it's actually very interesting when you look at how our understanding of the brain has changed over time. It wasn't until the '90s that we began to understand how dynamic the brain is and that it does change over our entire lifetime.

We'll also talk briefly about the brain's main function as it ensures survival of the species. And you might wonder why that would be important, and hopefully soon you'll understand why. But finally, that the brain changes that occur during adolescence offer us significant opportunities for learning. And, of course, this is what we as educators need to understand.

So, all brains do change over time and they change in two capacities. Obviously, they change developmentally from the time that we're born and changes developmentally up to approximately 25 years of age, on average, with males taking longer than females for the brain to reach that end of maturation period.

Adolescence is defined as the period of time from the onset of puberty until the prefrontal cortex is mature. And that might seem sort of like ... so, in other words, a 25 years old could be an adolescent? Technically. And, again, we'll be looking at how that occurs here in a few minutes.

Also, our brains change over time in response to use. Very much like we would say that a muscle changes according to use. If you exercise a muscle, it has the capacity to become larger. If you don't use a muscle, it can also diminish in size. With respect to the brain, we call this plasticity, or more specifically, neuroplasticity. And this continues throughout our lifetime. But what is very important for us to understand is that our brain is most receptive to these big changes during adolescence.

And what this means for us is that teens are ... they can do a lot with their brains. And they can do a lot of good things with their brains. They are primed for the opportunity to learn and they can ... I'm not sure how I'm going to say this best ... they need to be challenged. And they need to have us require them to do challenging things because their brains really crave that even though they may not necessarily behave as if they are.

Whoops, sorry. There we go.

And I apologize for the fuzziness of this slide but I thought it was a good way for us to just sort of think about this developmentally progressing maturation. So that we look in this using the school photos, we see that the brain changes. The colors are representative of areas of the brain that are most actively prepared to or most ... from a maturation standpoint, most prepared to engage in whatever activity that area of the brain is responsible for.

So as we move from age five to the years of adolescence, which would be the two middle photos and brains, and then finally, when we get into the 20s then ... and you see that red circle with the label the prefrontal cortex. That's the region that interests us most today as educators because this is the region of the brain where the brain is capable of logic, of planning, of problem solving, and being able to make good decisions. Especially when we understand the consequences.

Earlier in ... I'm going to go to the next slide here ... Early in the development, we see ... and we're going to talk about this from the bottom up. So by the time a child is nine years old, all the circuitry is there.

It's kind of like if you were building a house and the electrician had been there and had put in the wiring. You know, had put in the electrical box and had the wiring running through the walls so that it's there but it isn't actually ready to do as much as it will eventually be capable of. So, in other words, for that electricity to do something for you, like turn on your oven, cook your food, or light a room, things have to be hooked up to it and connections have to be made. And that's what's going to continue to happen actually throughout our lifetime. That's what I'm talking about with the neuroplasticity.

So as we move, then, into the 10-15 year old range, which during that time, puberty would be starting. Now we see that the brain is better equipped to plan, to retain information, to solve problems, and most specifically, control emotions, even though if you remember being a teen in that age range, or if you work with teens in that age range, you might think they don't do a very good job of controlling their emotions, and there's a very good reason for that.

The brain matures from the back to the front. And so on the left hand side of the screen, or the brain, that's where that prefrontal cortex is located and all parts of the brain mature before that particular region of the brain. And that's the region of the brain that is entirely responsible for moderating emotions, for helping someone who just got cut off in traffic to enable them to control their potential road rage. And that's the front of the brain that's responsible for that.

And so, as we move into our 16-20 age, through 25 year old range, now the brain has completed a lot of connections and it is able to handle more complex reasoning. And as that prefrontal cortex continues to mature, then better and better decision making occurs, less risk taking occurs, and so we begin to see a change from those adolescent behaviors into what we would consider to be those more adult behaviors.

So, and if you read more about this, or you may have already been more familiar. You'll hear it referred to as plasticity, or brain plasticity, or neuroplasticity. So brain plasticity is the capacity of the brain to change with learning. But to change, there needs to be stimulating activity in the neurons. Those are the functional cells within the brain and we literally have billions of them.

And this is where we begin, where the rubber meets the road. That as educators we need to understand that the more rigorous and engaging the activity is that we're doing, and the more frequently that is repeated and reviewed, then the more change in the brain is going to occur.

And if we were able to ... if you're a fan of Jeopardy, and you're reading the questions as Alec is saying them and you're thinking, "Wow, I used to know that." That's because that information was at some point not only ... we say it's in my brain ... but it's physically there and you're able to access it because of the connections. But the brain is a very efficient organ and what it does is if there's information that we're not using anymore, then the brain doesn't maintain those connections and it builds new connections based on whatever it is that we're using; whatever information we're learning or whatever we're using it for at the time.

Lots and lots of brain studies have shown us that things like playing music, learning a new skill, learning new information, that we actually see these physical or physiological changes in the brain. So the red circled area, that's what we want to focus on.

So, we talk about neuroplasticity, but we need to recognize, there's kind of the good news and the bad news. The good news is the positive neuroplasticity, and that refers to the ... for example, PET scans of London cab drivers, that they actually have a larger structure in the brain called the hippocampus, which is where memory storage occurs. And London cab drivers are considered to be sort of the masters of memory because of how complex the layout of London is.

We also know that bilingual speakers have a larger area of the brain called the parietal cortex where language, the region of the brain primarily responsible for language. If an individual has an injury to that region of the brain, such as a stroke, we would see that language would be ... might even disappear or might be damaged in some way.

And just tossing in a little sort of a ... particularly if you have younger children. Learning a musical instrument before age seven has lasting benefits on brain plasticity. And it is the actual playing of a musical instrument is the most beneficial as compared to say, singing. And that's beneficial too in learning to read music but it's the actual playing of the instrument. The motor skills that is associated with it that really make it very beneficial.

Unfortunately, we can also have what we call negative neuroplasticity. So what we know, unfortunately, is that if a child is under chronic stress, and that could apply to children in poverty, children who have poor nutrition, children who are sleep deprived, which often happens particularly as we move farther into the adolescent period, or of course, substance abuse. Those things can all inhibit the formation of those neural connections and can interfere with the opportunity that plasticity provides.

So, getting into a little bit of that survival stuff. Our brain is always ready and if it weren't our species would not survive. And when we look at the brain from an evolutionary perspective, it might not make sense that that front part of the brain where the arrow is pointing that enables us to plan and problems solve. It might seem sort of odd to you that that's the last part of the brain that matures. Because you might logically say, "Well, if that were functioning earlier, wouldn't that be better for us?" Logically, yeah, kind of.

But what we know is that other parts of the brain are actually more important because they are what enable us to survive. And again, you must think about survival more broadly, or more primitively, from the perspective of being able to avoid danger. So being able to react when the fire alarm goes off or when you smell smoke, or when something is rushing at you in a threatening manner. We don't want to have to process that and say, "Hmm, let me think about this problem I have. Should I stand here and think about this or should I start running?"

That all is going to happen automatically. And again, in terms of survival, we want to be able to make those kinds of responses as early as possible, as young as possible. And so, we have these different regions of the brain. And what we call the reptilian brain, that's the part of the brain that's going to control things like our respiration, heart rate, those kinds of things. And then we have that emotional brain. And that emotional brain is important because it lets us process emotions. And positive emotions actually help us to remember things better. The emotional brain and that limbic or where the amygdala is found, that's what's going to enable us to form groups and to mate and have children. Obviously, very important for the species.

It is that emotional brain, though, that is in hyper drive in adolescence. And thus, can actually lead us to have the challenging aspects of adolescent behavior to deal with. So what I want to do here, is just to take time for a brain check. And because I've just given you sort of a very, very quick biology basics primer that's going to set us up for the rest of the webinar. So we're just going to take a bit of a pause here, and if there are any questions that you have, then hopefully I'll be able to answer them for you now.

Amy Moritz: Kathy, I'm going to monitor that for you. And I am just waiting to see if people have anything to submit. We'll just give them a minute.

Kathy Gephart: While we're waiting for you to hopefully type in some questions. I mean, I'd love to think that, you know, that that was so crystal clear that you don't have any questions. But this is tough information and it may be very new to you. I'm just going to go back to this slide while we're waiting to see if there might be any questions.

Amy Moritz: There actually have not been any questions yet, Kathy, so I'll jump in if I see something but why don't you just go ahead.

Kathy Gephart:

Okay, again, we're monitoring for questions from you. Before we go forward and while we're waiting to see if there are any questions, I did want to share this one little interesting piece of information is that we as adults are typically very good at recognizing emotions. In other words, if someone is feeling fear, or surprise, or sadness, any of those emotions. We, as adults, are very good at recognizing those emotions without the person having said anything, just by their facial expressions.

But what's very interesting is that teens aren't very good at that. And just as this little graphic shows, that if a face is demonstrating fear, 100% of adults would recognize that, but probably only 50% of teens would recognize that.

And the implications for that are, of course, that when we are as classroom teachers or parents, when we're trying to communicate something with our facial expressions to a classroom full of kids or like I say, our children. We think we're communicating very well that we're annoyed, or we're surprised, or we're angry. And they may not be interpreting it as such. And again, that's because when we look at the brain activity in adults and their brain activity when they see a facial expression, it's the front of the brain that lights up, but for the teens, it's that emotional center of the brain that's causing the problem.

So I have a polling question here, just again, asking you to sort of reflect back. And thinking about what you were like as a teen. And I gave you some choices here. Were you the rebel without a cause? So you were the type a kid that always was looking for something to disagree with the adults in your life. You weren't really sure what you were angry with, but there was something. And that would choice A.

For choice B, you just wanted to go through high school being as, or middle and high school, as invisible as possible. You wanted to fly under the radar. You wanted to just do what you were supposed to do and not draw any attention to yourself.

Or maybe you were Cinderella and so you worked hard, but that was because you figured that something good was going to happen later. Someday, your prince would come, theoretically.

And I guess the last one I better explain in case you don't know who Doogie Houser was. Doogie Houser was a ... it was a television show where the young man had a very, very high IQ and was starting medical school while the rest of his peers were in high school or even middle school. It's been a while since I've seen that program. So, just asking for your feedback. What were you like as a teen?

One of the things that we know about learning, we retain the information that we're hearing if we can connect it to something that's already known. We call that our background knowledge. And so I'm asking this question to because I want to

activate some of your background knowledge, thinking about what you might have been like as a teenager.

And so thank you for responding. We're getting some good results. So most of you, males and females I presume, were the Cinderella. I'm just going to kind of work along through here until I get to something better. And we do have some rebels. Interestingly, when I was driving here this morning, I was listening to Tom Petty radio, or the Tom Petty channel on my Sirius station. And he has a song, The Great White Open, and one of the phrases in the song is rebel without a clue. And so I couldn't help thinking about that as we think about some of the students. So there are our results. A little over half of you were in the Cinderella mode.

So as we head now into the main part of the practical side of things, looking at those changes that occur during adolescence that provide us with those significant opportunities for learning.

So this slide is one of the, if I could put like little fireworks going off, this is one of the slides that I think is most important for you as a takeaway. If you didn't already know this. That when we compare one of the biggest differences between the adult and teen brain is that most of the activity in the adult brain is in the frontal lobe: thinking, reasoning, planning. But most of the activity in the teen brain is focused in the center. And that's also what we can refer to as that ... it's that emotional center but it's also that pleasure/reward center.

And this is why teens, for example, like their phones and like video games. They are looking for ... they like extreme sports. Because all of those activities are rewarding to them and they would much rather engage in those activities that give them that sort of those positive feelings than they would in something that isn't necessarily as pleasurable, like doing their math homework, or cleaning their room, or taking out the garbage. Those kinds of things.

In this next slide, the most important thing here is the word novelty. And that novelty activates the dopamine system meaning that ...dopamine is a chemical, a neurotransmitter in the brain. And it is what's released when we are engaged in something that's pleasurable to us. And compared to adults, adolescents have a lower baseline level of dopamine activity and a greater sensitivity to it, and what triggers that is novelty, is one of the things. So adolescents may seek novelty more and may experience a greater reward from novelty as a result of this robust dopamine system. And I don't mean to kind of overwhelm you there with the terminology. But the idea is that if they've been playing a video game, their susceptibility or sensitivity to dopamine is going to give them a higher reward than if we were playing the same game. All right, so.

All right. Now this is a pretty big table and if you are ... if you print the handout and look at this later, there's a lot of information here. But what I want to point out to you is that when we talk about risk taking and sensation seeking and preference for being with peers and reward seeking and romantic and sexual

attraction to others. Those things that we seem to be fighting against, but that from an evolutionary perspective, those things are necessary. It's kind of going back to that survival, the brain in survival mode. So the risk taking is part of driving them out of the parental nest and into the world. The sensation seeking, stimulating a desire to explore the world that they'll be a part of.

And when you dig into a lot of this information and the research from it, it's why it is ... when we think about it, it's rather counterintuitive to think that adolescents at the age of 15 or 16 or 18 or even 20, that they can clearly identify what it is that they want to study and do for the rest of their lives. They've got so many brain changes yet to occur and that makes it hard for them to actually ... and it makes sense, actually know what it is that they would like to do going forward.

Okay, so let's get to the literacy stuff. So what about it? Well, first of all, making sure that we're all understanding sort of a common representation of what we mean by the word literacy. That literacy extends beyond the print-only world of reading and writing. Literacies are shaped by contexts, participants, and technologies. And this was never more true than it is today. Particularly when we talk about technologies. There's more and more brain research going on that shows us that our brains are ... neuroplasticity thing again. That our brains are changing because of the technologies that we use. And it's really actually, some aspects of this research, it's actually a little frightening. There's a wonderful ... if you've ever seen the ... if you've ever looked at any of the Ted-Ed videos. Short little videos that wonderfully engaging as they explain various kinds of concepts. But there's a wonderful little Ted-Ed video about how technology is changing the brain. And it really is a good one to show to students so that they get a at least a better picture of what's happening as a result of technology usage.

So, being literate is at the heart of learning in every subject matter. So even if you're a math teacher, we all need to be ... having adolescents be engaged in literacy activities. As students progress through school and engage with subject areas more deeply, concepts become more challenging. Students use a greater variety of learning resources with more and more complex language.

It just keeps getting tougher and tougher, which is good. But what we need to remember is that just because we know it's good for them, it doesn't mean that they're equipped to handle it yet and that we need to support them in developing those skills.

Students learn writing and reading strategies, using evidence and reasoning pertinent to each subject area, to comprehend and represent knowledge using traditional and emerging media.

Kids love technology. No great revelation there. But that means that when we're struggling to engage them in school and in learning, we need to keep in mind what it is that they are drawn to. And so, we need to use technology to serve our needs and because that's what they're more likely to be drawn to. It also means that we need to teach strategies and model how to use these appropriately.

Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals ... and here are the big points ... to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.

We need our students to be good consumers of information and particularly, when it comes to informational text. We want them to be able to hear informational text like they would say on television news, or to read in a newspaper or online, we need them to be able to identify different perspectives. And to weigh them against one another.

So what else do we need to know? And this is not going to be terribly exciting. Imagine you putting this up in front of your students, but it's important information. According to the International Reading Association, adolescents need access to engaging and motivating content and instruction to support their continued development.

And so we need to make sure that we give them opportunities to work with text that includes both print and non-print materials. We need to provide them with opportunities to use web-based information. And also help them get better at discriminating the value or the validity of that information.

We need to offer access to relevant resources and to provide, of course, appropriate professional development for educators which would be what this webinar is supporting. But what that mean?

Well, Will Ferrel would say that no one knows what it means but it sure sounds good. Right? It's very provocative. Well, we being these well trained educators ... whoops, sorry, I went a little too far. Let me go back.

And we know that children change from those delightful elementary kids. Around 5th or 6th grade, reading isn't as much fun anymore. It's no longer about reading stories and talking through them. All of a sudden, they're thrown into six different classes and carrying huge, 25-pound textbooks with chapters, and main ideas, and summaries. And it's a completely different world. And we need to help students navigate that. Particularly when we remember that we have struggling readers.

So, here is an example. I have a lesson that I use a lot in professional development. And it's actually about cicadas. Some people would call them locusts, but they're actually cicadas like the 17 year cicadas. So if students were reading this on a computer screen, it would look like it is on the left. If we printed it from that website, and this happens to be one of my favorite sites ... it's the New York Times, it's their education ... they have a website that has lots and lots of great information in current events for teachers. And so this is what it would look like if I printed it out, as I printed it out from the website.

But here's what I did with it then. So, I took that article that I printed and I did several things to it. I added a subheading, Cicadas are amazing insects. I

increased the font size. I added questions at the beginning of each paragraph that serve as sort of an advanced organizer. As the students would be reading through it. I added additional space between the paragraphs and I moved the right hand margin in to provide space for note taking.

And so these are simple things we can do to help ... again, particularly struggling readers that may look at a lot of text on a page and feel very overwhelmed by that. And would be anticipating not necessarily being able to be as successful.

Another site that I hope many of you have heard about, is newsela. And what's great about that particular site, is that it allows you to print current event articles at different lexile levels. And the great thing is that, you print them at different lexile levels, based on your students needs, but the articles look alike. They look very similar so we don't have students that feel like they're being singled out because they need the easier reading, so to speak.

Just one little caveat about newsela, is that they don't archive their current events, so if you see something that you want, you need to save it because when you go back for it, it might not be there.

Okay, so let's take a close look at what we can do to take perceived difficulties and turn them into opportunities. I love this quote from President Truman. "A pessimist is one who makes difficulties of his opportunities and an optimist is one who makes opportunities of his difficulties."

So, we're going to look at some opportunities. And so what we're going to do, if you look in the first in the left hand column. I've chosen a couple of adolescent characteristics, one being impulsivity. All right? And remembering that because their brains, adolescent brains, are heavily influenced by the reward center. They tend to want and continue to want new demands, or bigger risks, and things like that.

So, what do we need to do? Well we need to, going to the middle column, we need to provide expressive opportunities. One way we can do that is providing them with creative writing opportunities in all content areas. So for example, and again, my background is science. So having chemistry students keep a log or a journal looking at it from if I were a chemist, or my life as a chemist. We could also provide photos that students could use as a writing prompt. Or even encourage them to bring in a photo or find something appropriate that they could use as a writing prompt. Using a favorite song as a writing prompt. And now because of Bob Dylan being recognized as a Nobel Prize winner, now we've got some of his lyrics that they could use as a writing prompt.

Another thing that we can do is, and this is huge for teens, is to offer choice. And particularly, choice of products to demonstrate understanding. So, not just relying on tests, but using these opportunities for them to be creative in their response.

And I'm wondering how many of you might be familiar with RAFT. And I have some website recommendations at the very end. And you could go to any of those sites and find out about RAFT.

So RAFT is a writing strategy that can be used in all content areas and offers students a choice in their writing. So the R in RAFT, the acronym, R stands for the role. The person or thing that the students will become. And I have an example slide, a couple of them, coming up so hang on and we'll get to that here shortly. A is the audience. So they would be writing to a particular audience. F is for the format, what format the writing would be. It could be a letter, like a letter to the editor. Or a letter home from a soldier. It could be a brochure, a memo, a speech, or an advertisement. It could even be an obituary. Perfect for Halloween. And the T would be for the topic. What it is that they will be writing about.

So, let me go on. It's also a great way to differentiate. So let me go on to this next slide so that we can ... all right, where we go, there we go ... so that we can get an example. So this one is one in math and I'm not a math teacher so some of these don't seem as easy to me, but the first ... let's just look at the top one. So, your role would be you're a fraction and you're going to send an invitation to a whole number to come to the family reunion. And in that invitation, you'd be talking about how you, the fraction, are related to the whole number. And then there are some other math examples there.

Let me go on to another example. So this could be used in foreign language or also English second language students. So you could be a cookbook writer. And your format is you're writing a recipe. And it could be instructions on how food is prepared. So, this would also work for a family consumer science class. You could be a customer sending a complaint to a restaurant owner about a problem with food or poor service. Okay? Or a student overseas writing to parents describing a typical meal that you ate with your guest family. So, hopefully you're getting the idea here.

Now, we all know that teens love to argue and debate. And that it's important that they have the opportunities to do that. And so, another little acronym, OREO, can be a good framework for them to share their opinion, and then with the instructions of providing reasons, and examples, and then to finish with their opinion. Giving them that framework is important and it can be very, very helpful to them so that they can have greater likelihood of being able to finish or to successfully complete a particular assignment.

What we, of course, know best about teens, is that adolescents think that it's all about them. They are the center of their universe and the rest of us are to be revolving around them. They think they're kind of a big deal. And they are in their emotionally driven world. They're not selfish. They just forget to think about other people. And so any time that we can give the structured opportunities to engage in self-awareness activities or to write about themselves, they will typically find that engaging.

So, a bio poem where they fill this in, this form, and then they ... oh, I'm sorry, go back ... And then, that can turn into and then they can illustrate it or add clip-art and so just using that template, you see that we can come up with something that's beautiful poetry. Poetry is a great opportunity in all kinds of content areas to engage students in very worthwhile writing activities.

We also can have them, speaking of poetry, they can write shaped-verse, or patterned poetry, where the letters, words, and lines of the poem are arranged to form a picture or an outline of the subject of the poem. An example is a poem in the shape of a Christmas tree. So since I've got a little bit of a Will Ferrell theme going on here, I, of course, had to include Elf in with our images as well.

Here's one, I know it's a little bit small. But this is one, it's actually very interesting poetry. But it's called The Fire. And it's, "I could feel the tin roof," And going on, involved with the fire. And so, really great opportunities for the students to express themselves and to think about how they like to express themselves.

So, I'm interested if any of you have tried some writing activities that might fall into the less heard of or more creative aspects. And so, if you have used a creative writing activity, we'd love to hear about it. If you could go ahead and share that with us because together we are a wealth of information. The tough part is finding the time and opportunities to share it. So if you have a creative writing activity that you've used, please share it with us.

Amy Moritz: Kathy, I'm on the line with you and I just opened up the questions pane and I'm just waiting to see what responses we get. Then I'll be glad to share those with everybody.

Kathy Gephart: On this screen, while we're waiting for hopefully some responses from you. Also, having students act things out and that's why I have the reader's theatre there as an example. And actually having students write reader's theatre. There are some websites that can give you information for how to do that. How to take text and turn it into a reader's theater and having the students act it out.

One of my student's favorite things that we did was I turned The Lorax, the storybook, The Lorax, into a reader's theatre. This was when we were studying ecology. And they loved that. When I run into former students in the grocery store, they say, "Remember when we did The Lorax." And so, it's always lots of fun for them and they remember it, obviously.

Amy Moritz: So Kathy, we did get one response from Melanie. She said that using a touching life event as a writing prompt. So I thought that was a great response. Thank you, Melanie. Does anybody else have any other ideas to share?

Kathy Gephart: Thank you, Melanie. Yeah, anything that can connect to their emotions is what they are tapping into naturally and it can lead to better effort on their part in terms of their writing.

Amy Moritz: We did just get one more in from, Tabina Washington. And she said that she had an 8th grade class write a book of poems reflecting the world they live in. And then, she had the book published for them, which is really cool. So thank you, Tabina.

Kathy Gephart: Awesome! Oh, I love that. So your ideas of course, I get to steal them and pass them along to the teachers that I am very lucky to work with.

Amy Moritz: And then, just one more that came in from Karen. She said she incorporates daily writing prompts and journal activity to give them practice writing each day. So, thanks Karen.

Kathy Gephart: Thank you, Karen. And that brings up a good point that students can resist writing but the more we have them write, the more we increase their stamina for writing, and also develop their fluency, so it really makes sense. And, of course, writing to learn is one of the best ways that we can help students process information a little bit better.

So, this is a new chart. And so I've chosen the characteristic poor decision making. And so, the recommendation is that we provide opportunities for better decision making. And that can be accomplished by having students create polls and administer them where they're looking at both sides of something or looking at making choices that could fall into different categories. And there's so many great technological tools to do that. Socrative, Survey Monkey, Twitter, those are all just, I mean, that's barely scratching the surface. I'm sure some of you know many more than that.

Something else that's important is that opportunity to argue or debate, examination of right/wrong scenarios, that could include, say for example, using the RAFT strategy, writing opinion pieces such as a letter to the editor. And when we're talking about challenging activities for students, many times that will involve more long-range activities that have a due date into the next week. And remembering that students need help with that. Particularly students who come from poverty situations, that their organizational skills and long range planning skills will not be as developed.

I want to show you one of my favorite activities for getting students to look at both sides of an issue. And the activity is discussion web. And I'll show you that here in a moment.

So, this is the opening that I would use for if you're familiar with Collin's writing, or quick write, that can be used to activate background knowledge. So I asked the students, "How do you feel about the hunting and killing of animals?" And asked them to write five lines in one and a half minutes. Then what we do is, I pose a question or a problem, and I use this template, that I'm very happy to share with you if you email me afterwards.

And here would be the question or problem: Hunting endangered animals on private game preserves is wrong. And I used this with a current event article from newsela about, if you remember the uproar about the dentist who was a big game hunter and who killed the lion that was on a preserve, but then just off of the preserve. And so the protocol for this ... and I know we're running, we're getting towards the end of our time ... but this is a very, very good activity.

So what you have the students do, I have them first work in pairs and they read the article and they have to find an equal number of yes or no support statements, regardless of how they feel. Then they combine with another pair to form a group of four, and here's the fun and tough part. As a group, they have to reach consensus. Either it is wrong, or it isn't wrong. And the article provides both perspectives. So, they have to reach agreement. Once they reach agreement, they pick one to three statements from the article that supports it. And they choose a spokesperson to report out to the entire class. And then finally, they individually write an argumentative essay supporting their personal opinion.

So let me just kick back to the form. So, you see they put the agreed characteristics from the article on the left, disagreed on the right. And then, the bottom is their group solution, or their group statement, but then they would follow that up with an individual response because they don't like having to go along with something that they don't agree with.

And again, I'm very, very happy to share this with you. And the form is in a Word document. Here, this goes along with the statement. Many students are not good at planning for long-term assignments, especially students who come from poverty. And this is just kind of a random timeline. But we have to model and really guide them through that process if we want them to get better at this.

One other thing, as we're winding down, to remember is that adolescents are, they love being, they're very, very, very social. And they want to be together. And so, we need to take advantage of that and structure opportunities for them to talk things out even to the point of arguing. It's important to remember, that while teens have a need to be social, they also fear embarrassment and being wrong. And so, we want to provide as safe an opportunity as we can.

So here's just a few images. This is one called writing around text. Where you give them a piece of text. It might be something from Shakespeare. Or something from a social studies, a primary source document, like the Bill of Rights, or the Gettysburg Address. And that they would respond to that just by writing around it which is so much fun for them. And it really is a great activity.

There's an activity called written conversation where they actually exchange papers. Which is like passing notes, so they always love that one.

And we're just about out of time. Just going to show you a couple of images of ways you can have kids writing at the same time. And sorry to rush those last few slides but you have the handout and so you can see those pictures. These are

some of the websites that I am particularly fond of. There's so much great information. Hopefully, some of those are ones that you haven't seen before.

I want to thank you so very much, again, for joining and for being part of this webinar. And I hope that it's been very valuable for you. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me. My email's there on the screen. And I will do my very best to respond.

Amy Moritz:

Thank you so much, Kathy. And thanks to everybody for joining us today. Again, if you have questions, especially about those last couple slides as you look through your handout there, please feel free to reach out to Kathy for more information or any additional handouts. I know she did mention that she had one that she'd be willing to share.

The archive recording will be available at the 21st Century website within the week. And we'll send an email with the link to all registrants and liaisons. Now when you receive the electronic evaluation via email, please take a few moments to complete it as your feedback helps us to offer professional development of the highest quality.

Thank you again everyone for joining us today. And thank you, Kathy, for your presentation. This concludes today's webinar.